

Maurice Hinchey NEWS

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HINCHEY ASSAILS ADMINISTRATION'S DECISION TO WITHHOLD FIRST RESPONDER GRANTS

KINGSTON - U.S. Representative Maurice Hinchey (NY-26) today strongly condemned a decision by the Bush Administration to withhold \$651 million in grants to first responders. The funding was included in the stopgap appropriations bill passed by Congress last month to ensure that grant money for emergency responders would not be held up during the ongoing budget impasse.

"President Bush's rhetoric on this topic and the actions of his administration have been diametrically opposed," said Hinchey. "Since the tragedy of September 11, the president has taken every opportunity to laud the work of firefighters and other emergency workers and to promise his support. But he has gone out of his way to pass up every opportunity to actually provide help."

The revelation of this decision to withhold the grant money continues a pattern of the president holding high-profile photo-ops with first responders and subsequently rejecting money for them. Specifically, President Bush used a veto threat to kill Democratic legislation for \$550 million in emergency grants for first responders immediately after September 11. Then, in August of 2002, Bush outright rejected \$150 million for first responders, vetoing a portion of a bipartisan supplemental appropriations bill.

Unable to reach agreement on appropriations for fiscal year 2003, Congress adjourned after passing a continuing resolution to keep the federal government running until the 108th session of Congress convenes in January. Because of the urgent need for grants to first responders, Congress specifically included in the continuing resolution \$651 million for that purpose. In December 2 memo, Assistant Attorney General Deborah Daniels states that the awarding of these grants will be delayed until the budget impasse is resolved. It is not known when that will be.

"The whole point of that provision of the continuing resolution was to make sure that something as important as this didn't get held up because Congress and the White House can't get their act together on appropriations," Hinchey added. "America needs to start looking past Mr. Bush's rhetoric and see what he's really doing. In the effort to help first responders prepare for severe emergencies, he clearly is doing nothing at all."